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Chairman: Mr. Sharma ..... (Nepal)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 122: Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (*continued*) (A/56/817, A/56/879 and A/56/930; A/57/224)

1. **Mr. Christiansen** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland and Norway, said that the European Union was ready to discuss the large number of recommendations contained in the reports of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). To the extent possible, however, the number of recommendations should be reduced. The audit of the policies and procedures for recruiting staff for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (A/57/224) indicated that the principle of geographical distribution of candidates selected for appointment to posts approved by the General Assembly on an emergency basis had been broadly respected, although the European Union agreed with the observation of OIOS that there was room for further improvement. The Union also noted with satisfaction the efforts of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to address the issue of gender balance and the related recommendations of OIOS.

2. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) asked why the report of OIOS on its audit of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), contained in document A/56/907, had not been introduced and when it was proposed to introduce it. His delegation attached great importance to the work of oversight bodies such as OIOS. He had a number of specific questions concerning the reports already introduced.

3. He was surprised, firstly, at the inclusion in the report on the audit of the policies and procedures for recruiting staff for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (A/57/224) of a recommendation that the Office of Human Resources Management should monitor the recruitment process for each vacancy. Such monitoring should be an integral part of the normal activities of the Office and not the subject of a specific recommendation.

4. With regard to the report on the post-implementation review of the Integrated Management Information System at United Nations Headquarters (A/56/879), he would welcome an update on the status of implementation of recommendations 5, 6, 7, 11 and 15. In addition, with respect to recommendation 6, he would welcome clarification of why a request had been made to the General Assembly for extrabudgetary funding for the study of the further consolidation of databases.

5. His delegation noted with satisfaction the generally favourable review of the performance of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and, in particular, the Commission's willingness to implement the recommendations of OIOS. Despite its excellent performance, however, further improvement was still possible. With reference to paragraphs 44 and 45 of the relevant report (A/56/930), for example, he wondered why the Commission would retain on its payroll senior managers who lacked the requisite leadership skills. He would welcome information on the action that had been taken with respect to the managers in question. He also sought an explanation of why different interpretations of recosting methodology had reduced the amount of compensation that had been earmarked for temporary assistance, technical assistance and consultants.

6. Lastly, with reference to the report on the inspection of programme management and administrative practices in the Department for Disarmament Affairs (A/56/817), his delegation was of the view that recommendations should be fewer in number and should focus on the most critical issues, leaving managers to focus on matters that fell within the scope of their normal responsibilities.

7. **Mr. Niiya** (Japan), referring to the report of OIOS on the audit of the policies and procedures for recruiting staff for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (A/57/224), said that his delegation acknowledged the recent efforts made by the Secretariat to shorten the overall recruitment time frame. It was concerned, however, that the recruitment time frame for regular posts in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in 2001 had been longer than that for regular posts in the Secretariat in 1999. Clearly, the goal of filling vacancies within a maximum period of 120 days would not be achieved without continuous effort and attention on the part of both the

Office of Human Resources Management and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

8. His delegation was also concerned about the inconsistencies in the qualifications and experience specified in the vacancy announcements for posts in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Vacancy announcements should be based on generic job profiles, so as to promote transparency, attract a larger number of candidates and foster mobility among staff, and the Office of Human Resources Management should ensure consistency between generic job profiles and vacancy announcements.

9. He recalled that, in paragraph 12 of resolution 56/241, the General Assembly expressed concern over the imbalance in the geographical representation of Member States in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and urged the Secretary-General to take immediate measures to improve the representation of underrepresented and unrepresented Member States in future recruitment. He endorsed, in that connection, the recommendation of OIOS (A/57/224, recommendation 4) that the Department should review the current composition of its staff in terms of geographical distribution and take appropriate steps with a view to further improving the situation during the next phase of recruitment for the additional posts approved by the General Assembly in resolution 56/241. The report before the Committee covered recruitment activities in DPKO in 2001. However, in the light of the substantial number of additional posts established by the Assembly, his delegation wished to propose that OIOS should conduct a further audit of recruitment activities in DPKO in 2002.

10. **Mr. Obame** (Gabon) welcomed the overall positive assessment of the programme management and administrative practices of the Department for Disarmament Affairs and supported the recommendation that a proactive stance should be taken in mainstreaming disarmament in other substantive areas throughout the Organization. It also supported the recommendations aimed at ensuring the long-term viability and effectiveness of the regional centres. He noted that, despite its limited resources, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament, at Lomé, had organized and funded a conference on confidence-building measures, security and development within the framework of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and had contributed to the establishment of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX). It also published the results of its investigations aimed at unearthing and destroying arms caches as well as the results of its studies on peace and disarmament. For all those reasons, the Centre should be given adequate financial and material resources to enable it to carry out the activities and mandate for which it had been established.

11. **Mr. Pulido León** (Venezuela), with reference to the query by the representative of the United States of America as to why the report of OIOS on the audit of INSTRAW had not been introduced, recalled that, in resolution 56/125, the General Assembly had decided to establish a working group to make recommendations to the Assembly on the future operation of the Institute. The working group's recommendations had been transmitted to the Secretariat but had still not been published in the six official languages. Accordingly, the Group of 77 and China had requested that the Fifth Committee should not take up the report until it had been issued in all official languages and examined by the Third Committee.

12. **Ms. Thomas** (Jamaica), referring to the report of OIOS on its inspection of programme management and administrative practices in ECLAC (A/56/930), said that the restructuring exercise at ECLAC had further enhanced the Commission's image as a source of innovative research on economic and social issues for the region of Latin America and the Caribbean. Her delegation was gratified to note the report's conclusion that ECLAC maintained its historic standing of intellectual excellence, pertinent policy advice and effective technical assistance. It would have been preferable, however, for the report to include an update on the status of implementation of the recommendations relating to the subregional office in Port of Spain so as to give a more balanced picture.

13. Caribbean States could all attest to the invaluable technical assistance given by the subregional office in Port of Spain in the implementation of the mandates of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC). Caribbean States also benefited from the numerous reports prepared by the office on economic and social development issues. The office emphasized harmonization of the economic, social and environmental dimensions in order to achieve sustainable development and had provided valuable advice to Caribbean States during their preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In

light of the forthcoming review of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), in 2004, the continued assistance of the subregional office, which served as secretariat for the Programme of Action, was vital.

14. Lastly, the sharing of information and coordination between the various subregional offices of ECLAC was of critical importance to the region as a whole and a further step towards promoting synergies between the Caribbean and Latin American regions. Her delegation looked forward to further progress in that area.

15. **Mr. Wins** (Uruguay) said that the report of OIOS on the inspection of programme management and administrative practices in ECLAC (A/56/930) both confirmed the Commission's historic standing of intellectual excellence and pertinent policy advice to the countries of the region and underscored the difficulties it faced in carrying out its activities. It would be difficult to implement the recommendation that various activities should be financed from extrabudgetary resources, particularly if the countries of the region, which were currently facing one the most severe financial crises in their history, were expected to contribute to their funding. While ECLAC had succeeded in doing more with less, the increase in postponements from 1.8 to 3.2 per cent of total mandated outputs gave cause for concern.

16. In the area of human resources management, OIOS had identified shortcomings in staff-management relations in ECLAC. The Commission should fully implement the recommendations that had been made to address those shortcomings. The large number of posts that had remained vacant for long periods of time was also a cause of concern and the administration at ECLAC should take decisive action to fill all vacancies expeditiously.

17. Turning to the report of OIOS on the audit of the policies and procedures for recruiting staff for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (A/57/224), he said that Uruguay, as an important troop contributor, was committed to fulfilling the requirements for participation in peacekeeping operations. It was therefore concerned at the lack of progress towards shortening the recruitment time frame and at the inadequacy of the mechanism used for the evaluation of candidates. In general, his delegation endorsed the recommendations of OIOS in that regard and agreed that the Office of Human Resources Management should effectively monitor the recruitment process for each vacancy with a view to ensuring that the recruitment time frames envisaged in the Secretary-General's report on human resources management reform were achieved.

18. **Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic), referring to the presentation of the reports before the Committee, asked why OIOS had not complied with paragraph 12 of resolution 53/208 B and paragraph 6 of section III of resolution 56/242, in which the General Assembly reiterated that all documents submitted to legislative organs by the Secretariat and expert bodies for consideration and action should have conclusions and recommendations in bold print. He pointed out that in paragraph 7 of section III of the latter resolution, OIOS was specifically requested to submit its reports in accordance with the aforementioned provisions.

19. **Mr. Nair** (Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services) expressed satisfaction that those members who had spoken under the item believed that OIOS was on the right track. With regard to the reports before the Committee, he said that OIOS always sought to emphasize a limited number of recommendations to enable management to focus on those that it regarded as critical.

20. He agreed that monitoring the recruitment process was a natural management function and that the recommendation made to the Office of Human Resources Management in that regard in document A/57/224 was somewhat redundant. He noted, however, that individual departments also had a role to play. In that connection, he was pleased to report that compliance with recruitment time frames was one of a set of management indicators introduced by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. In addition, under an initiative developed by the Department of Management, all heads of department would soon be able to monitor the time taken to fill vacancies using a computerized system.

21. OIOS would monitor the implementation of the recommendations made in document A/57/224. However, the possibility of conducting a further audit of recruitment activities in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations would have to be considered in the context of the Office's work plan. The earliest time at which such an audit could be undertaken would

be 2004, and it would be the Department's performance in 2003 that came under scrutiny.

22. Regarding the implementation of recommendations 5, 6, 7, 11 and 15 in document A/56/879, he said that, as of August 2002, the substantive interest groups had yet to prepare a schedule of regular meetings. The study on the issues surrounding further consolidation of the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) databases would begin later in the year. It had been decided that implementation of IMIS should take place first in the peacekeeping missions, so that any problems that arose could be ironed out prior to the system's implementation in the Tribunals. The issue of the implementation of the long-term maintenance plan had yet to be referred to the Steering Committee. As to the business continuity plan, although work on it had not yet been completed, the Information Technology Services Division had indicated that additional resources would be required in order to cover all the scenarios envisaged.

23. Concerning the situation outlined in paragraphs 44 and 45 of document A/56/930, he said that the contract of one of the ECLAC officials concerned had not been extended, while the other official was about to retire. Regrettably, OIOS had seen a number of cases, not only in ECLAC, in which managers, despite having excellent substantive skills, failed to provide adequate leadership and oversight. The shortfall in the budgetary resources provided to ECLAC had occurred because of the effects of inflation and fluctuations in the exchange rate of the Chilean peso. However, the problem had now been resolved. OIOS always sought to take into account in its reports the information provided by departments on the status of implementation of its recommendations. However, it also had to issue the reports as expeditiously as possible, and the data from the ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean in Port-of-Spain had been submitted too late for inclusion in document A/56/930. OIOS would, of course, continue to track the follow-up of the recommendations by the Port-of-Spain office and would keep the Committee abreast of the progress made.

24. Lastly, he said that only where a report contained recommendations directed at an intergovernmental body would the recommendations appear in bold print. The recommendations in the reports before the Committee were directed at management.

Other matters

25. **Mr. Bouheddou** (Algeria) said that, in paragraph 103 of resolution 56/253, which had been adopted by the General Assembly on the report of the Fifth Committee, the Secretary-General was requested to make proposals to strengthen the Terrorism Prevention Branch at the United Nations Office at Vienna. To his delegation's great surprise, the report in question (A/57/152) had been submitted to the Third Committee, whereas it should have been submitted to the Fifth Committee for consideration under agenda item 112, "Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003". The submission to the Third Committee of a report requested by the Fifth Committee on the basis of a unilateral decision by the Secretariat not only constituted a violation of the rules of procedure, but also risked creating a dangerous precedent. In the same resolution, the Secretary-General was requested to submit proposals on strengthening the Department of Public Information. That report, however, had been submitted to the Fifth Committee. The selectivity demonstrated by the Secretariat in its handling of the two reports raised questions as to the real motives for its actions. If the report contained in document A/57/152 raised concerns for certain delegations, they should express those concerns during the Committee's deliberations rather than resort to procedural manoeuvres to try to avoid discussion of the substantive issues. He requested an explanation from the Secretariat and asked that the report should be submitted to the Fifth Committee for consideration at the current session.

26. **Mr. Acakpo-Satchivi** (Secretary of the Committee) said that he would inform the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division of the concerns just expressed and request him to explain to the Committee the reasons for the report's issuance under agenda item 102, "Crime prevention and criminal justice".

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.